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論文（*Article*）

Intercultural Encounters in Literary Texts: Japanese Misreadings

シャーリー・アダムス
Shirley Adams

For Japanese readers, the barriers to understanding literary texts in English are not mainly linguistic but cultural. Some aspects of reading that are natural for Western readers are contrary to the reading habits of Japanese, and a Western process of reasoning from sign to the most probable conclusion must be learned. Since inferring from signs required for reading literature is the same that English speakers do in daily communication, exercises in this kind of reasoning would be very useful in the English language curriculum in Japan.

Key Words : Natural Signs, Given Signs, Inference, Logical Reasoning, Literary Misreadings

When Japanese encounter literary texts in English, they experience various obstacles to understanding what they are reading. Among these, the language barrier often is not the greatest challenge. The social order of which we are members influences the ways we focus on and interpret the phenomena we encounter in the world, including the texts we read. In the Japanese social order, focus on the world and on texts, as well as interpretations of them, differ fundamentally from Western literary writers' assumptions concerning the habits of mind of their readers. This discrepancy, if not somehow overcome, produces misunderstanding of texts.

Japanese experience life mainly as members of various circles and groups in which the individual is subordinated to the whole. Within groups each member is ranked according to a vertical hierarchy, those of higher status providing information, advice, instruction, and interpretation to persons of lower status. Those of lower rank receive information and follow instructions and advice without the intervention of their own viewpoint or interpretation. Each person's attention is focused especially on the individuals and concerns within the group. Since viewpoints and decisions are derived from consensus or by authority, inquiry and analysis need not, indeed should not, be done by individuals. Opinions about events and individuals are made by consensus according to the group's internal codes. If a person makes his own observations or draws his own conclusions, he should not say so. This system provides for a stable society, but is inimical to an essential aspect of reading Western literature, namely the drawing of inferences.

The kind of inference required for reading Western literature comes more naturally to members of horizontally ordered societies than to those of societies organized vertically, such as Japan. People in the West find themselves in fewer paired relations of higher and lower rank than do Japanese. Ranked horizontally in social classes, individuals within a particular class often do not know precisely the status of people they converse with or do business with. Even within circles and groups, people often are unaware of the relative status of some of the members, nor do they think much about it. At least, it is good form to treat everyone as equals, even if they are not. In these societies there are of course relationships that require the passive reception of information and instructions, but more often than

in Japan, individuals in the West should draw inferences and form judgments on their own. Attention often is focused beyond the concerns of the groups and its members, and since individuals receive less advice from superiors than do Japanese, they more often form their own views and draw their own inferences. Writers of literature assume these habits in their readers.

Inference From Signs in Daily Life and in Literary Texts

Natural Signs

Some kinds of inference are universal. People in all societies infer from sensory evidence, sometimes known as "natural signs," things not known or not visible. Survival of the social order depends in part on the ability of individual members to infer from natural signs such as facial expression and tone of voice the inner state of their associates. In hunter-gatherer societies life itself depends on the hunters' correct interpretation of signs, such as a sound in the bushes indicating the presence of an animal. And in modern urban cultures we draw conclusions from partial evidence about things not seen or not entirely known: if our cell phone rings we assume that someone is calling us; if the printer won't print, we infer that it is out of paper or ink. Also universal is a kind of inference that requires us to connect sensory data and a certain amount of cultural knowledge using a reasoning process, but one so simple that we often are not conscious of it.If we missed the weather forecast but look out the window and notice people carrying umbrellas, we infer that the forecast was for rain and we had better take an umbrella if we go out. Houses are signs requiring very little cultural knowledge for drawing inferences about the inhabitants. It is natural to assume that the residents of a large house are wealthier than those of a small house. In the inferences that are universal in daily life there is a natural connection between the clue and the conclusion drawn, or the sign is so commonplace that we rarely think about the logical process involved in arriving at the inference.

The natural signs from which Japanese draw inferences most frequently are those that pertain to matters of concern within their circles and in groups, especially the natural signs that suggest the relation in their associates between the inner and outer person. In his *The Anatomy of Self* well known psychiatrist Takeo Doi has analyzed the Japanese phenomena *omote/ura* and *honne/tatemae*. He explains that among Japanese, at the center of much personal interaction is the attempt to read exterior signs, the *tatemae*, to infer the inner self, the *honne*. The face and manner, manifesting the codes of the culture or the in-group, both conceal and express what is actually in the mind. Drawing this kind of inference is so pronounced in Japanese culture that Doi believes the terms inner and outer, *honne/tatemae*, as a dyadic pair may be uniquely Japanese.[1] That in daily life Japanese tend to be narrowly focused often prevents them from fully engaging with Western literary texts.

Western people are less exclusively focused than Japanese on concerns of their in groups, and they attend as well to phenomena in society and in the wider world more than do Japanese. It is quite usual for people in the West to draw logical conclusions where there is not an immediate, natural connection between sign and its referent. Often the inference requires an individual's experience or knowledge of something not immediately at hand and a logical process of reasoning toward the most probable conclusion. The conclusion might be a judgment about what must have happened or what might happen, or about a process, or about someone's character. Drawing inferences is not holding an opinion, rather it is drawing the most reasonable conclusion from the available partial evidence. The ways that Japanese and Westerners draw inferences in daily life influence the ways they read literature. Connecting natural signs with knowledge of the world and previous experience does not come naturally to Japanese, however for Western minds it is very usual to draw this kind of inference in daily life, often without being aware of the logical process involved.

1 Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Self*, p. 40.

Examples:

- A person in the West who has an earache might go to the doctor and tell him that he has an ear infection. The doctor asks a few questions, shines a light into his ear, and then writes a prescription. In this case the patient has connected his experience of pain and inability to swallow with his knowledge of physiology and of microbes and has come to a reasonable inference about his problem. After examining him, the doctor, applying his professional knowledge and training, comes to a more certain inference that indeed the patient has a bacterial middle ear infection and prescribes an antibiotic.

  In Japan, even if a patient is quite sure of his diagnosis -- an ear infection, or a sprained ankle, or an allergic reaction -- he should not say so to the doctor. He may say only how he feels or what happened -- his ear hurts when he tries to swallow, or he fell while jogging and his ankle hurts too much to walk, or he has a runny nose every year in the spring. The patient and doctor are in a vertical relation governed by detailed codes concerning the interaction between persons of higher and lower status. It is for the doctor to say that the patient has an ear infection, or a sprain, or hay fever.

- As friends are on their way to dinner in Osaka they walk past a restaurant where a waitress is loudly inviting passersby to enter. At a restaurant next door people are waiting in line in front of the entrance. A Westerner in the group might conclude that the first restaurant is likely to go out of business soon and that the owner of the second restaurant probably has better business sense than the owner of the first, but if he is culturally aware he will not mention his observation.

  The Japanese in the group are unlikely to think about the matter, since they are not having dinner at either of the restaurants and the owners are not in their in group. If they did draw any inference at all, they probably would not apply a reasoning process connecting their knowledge with their observation of the immediate natural signs and would conclude only that one restaurant is popular and the other is not.

- The host of a dinner parry, observing conventional Western manners, pours each guest a glass of wine while covering the label with his hand. They sip the wine and find it to be extraordinarily good. He says that he discovered a small winery on his recent trip to Portugal and bought several bottles. He then reveals the label. Portugal is not particularly well known for its wine, and it is a winery the guests have never heard of. Considering their own knowledge and previous experience of wine and connecting it to their encounter with something new, the guests have concluded that the wine is exceptional. The guests might make a further inference, namely that their host is a man of sophistication and discernment.

  When serving wine it is not unusual for Japanese to reveal clearly the label before pouring it and even to mention that it is expensive. If more than one wine is served, the host is likely to mention which is more expensive. The guests are assured that they are drinking a fine wine because it has the endorsement of a high status label and high price. The host has shown good judgment concerning wine since he has chosen a recognized brand.

Japanese are much less likely than Westerners to draw conclusions independently of consensus or authority. In the West, inferences about people, wines, and many other things, are often determined according to the conclusions drawn by individuals rather than only according to authority, consensus, brand, price, or status. Westen readers of literature bring these habits of mind to their reading of texts.

Given Signs

Western literary writers normally construct their texts using sequences of signs that resemble very much the natural signs from which their readers draw

inferences in daily life. In literature the signs, sometimes known as "given" signs, are placed in the text with the intention that readers will draw the expected inferences. Without the participation of the reader in supplying the intended conclusions the text is very incomplete, and sometimes is unintelligible. Western readers of literature automatically connect the given sign with details provided previously in the narrative and with their own experience and knowledge of the world to arrive at the most reasonable conclusion. They often do this without thinking about the reasoning process involved. The signs might be clues about an event not narrated directly, or indications of character traits or social class. Drawing the intended inferences from the author's given signs is essential to understanding the text. When reading Western literature, Japanese are hampered by their cultural prohibitions against making such connections themselves and by bringing to their reading of literary works a culture that does not encourage them to draw inferences other than those requiring natural connections, leading to misunderstanding of texts.

Given Signs: Literary Encounters in the Classroom

The school system might be regarded as a microcosm of the society as a whole. Japanese schools provide highly effective preparation for life in a collectivist, vertically organized society. The students who register for English and American Literature courses in the School of Policy Studies bring to their literature classes the habits of mind of their society and the study habits instilled in them by the school system. Although the range in English proficiency varies widely, nearly all students in these courses have a reading ability at the sentence level sufficient for the texts I have selected. However even the students with a fairly high level of fluency experience other difficulties with the texts.

Most of the students have mastered thoroughly the mainly passive learning required in school, that is to say, receiving information from authorities – teachers, texts – and reproducing the same information unchanged on tests, repeating the interpretations they have been given. On most tests the correct answer is a choice between true or false or between A, B, C, or D. An answer is either right or wrong, determined by its conformity to the authoritative source. When they read, students should retain each point in the text, giving each fact equal weight. They should not attempt to rank items of information according to their relative importance or determine the author's intention beyond the interpretation they have been given by a teacher or by a printed text. They should not draw their own inferences from the texts they read. In order to read Western literary texts they must acquire a second way of reading.

Perhaps the difficulties Japanese readers face can best be made clear with examples of actual responses to the texts they read.

Misreading Given Signs in Steinbeck's *The Pearl*

John Steinbeck's *The Pearl* is a novella based on a legendary tale that the author heard from a community of indigenous people when he visited Baja California in the early 20th century. Steinbeck's fictional version of the story is highly critical of the exploitation of native Mexicans by the descendants of Europeans, told with a simplicity incorporating elements of parable. Before we begin the story, I review with the students what is parable, remind them of a few historical facts about the presence of Europeans in Mexico, and explain what is social criticism and that in the West it is usual and acceptable to comment critically on the social order.

As the story opens, a native Mexican family is waking up at dawn. Among the few details revealing the way of life of the indigent community, the father, Kino, lying on his mat, observes in the wall of his brush house the "lightening square." How to arrive at a reasonable inference from such a detail, which Western readers do almost without thinking about it, mystifies Japanese students. They require a model of the reasoning process involved in arriving at the intended inference. In order to demonstrate how Western minds decide what is the most probable connection, I begin by asking the students why they think the author might have mentioned this particular detail. They expect the teacher to tell them the information they should memorize for the next test; they do not expect to be asked to draw inferences them-

selves from what they read. Sometimes a returnee or offspring of a multicultural family might hazard, “It's stormy?” I explain that *lightning* and *lightening* are homonyms and that *lightening* means becoming lighter. So if it's getting lighter, what time of day is it? Someone who knows that in English classes it's good to answer questions might offer, "It's morning?" Yes, very good, it's early morning. So what is the square in the wall that is becoming lighter? "A window?" I explain that this is a very good inference, but not the most probable one, since houses made from sticks cut from tall bushes are not likely to provide the luxury of windows. We should apply what we know about the world. We know that not all houses have windows (caves, igloos, tents, teepees, and probably brush houses), but what do all houses have? Finally we arrive at the correct inference, provided by me, that not all houses have windows but we know that all houses have an opening for the inhabitants to enter and leave. The “lightening square” is letting in light from outside, so it must be that opening. But since the light is coming in from outside, it means there is no barrier to entry; the house has no door. So the author is telling us indirectly that the inhabitants are poor and defenseless. The students are less interested in the process of arriving at inference than in the correct answer for the test: the house has no door.

That the house has no door appears to be a gratuitous detail, but is in fact the introduction to a fundamental theme in the story, namely the poverty and powerlessness of the community living in the brush houses, in contrast with the inhabitants of the adjacent town, whose stone houses have not only doors but also garden walls with gates. By correctly connecting a few contrasting details and drawing from our knowledge of the world, we should infer the difference in status, the horizontally stratified division, of two classes of people in two neighboring communities. This detail, the lack of a door, also provides in advance an explanation for how, a little later in the story, thieves could enter the house silently in the dark of night to search for a valuable pearl they believe is hidden in the floor.

A few paragraphs later the author continues this theme with additional details from which we should infer the relation of the inhabitants of the brush houses with those in the town. In the same family, when the baby is bitten by a scorpion the parents decide to take him to the doctor in the town. Their neighbors, hearing of the crisis, follow along in what the author describes as a “soft-footed procession into the center of the town.” I ask why the author might have mentioned this detail – what does it tell us about the people in the brush houses? Western readers of literature arrive at the inference instantly, but Japanese need a model for the thought process. I walk across the front of the classroom and point out that my shoes make sounds when I walk because they have hard soles. So what would be “soft-footed” walking? I ask whether there would be sounds when I walk if I took off my shoes or if I were wearing soft sandals. There is some hesitant nodding of heads.[2] So why is the walk to the town described as “soft-footed?” What comes immediately to the minds of Western readers is perplexing to the students in my classes, because the text presents only a descriptive detail, a given sign, rather than a direct summary statement, and they are as yet unable to transcend the cultural prohibition against stating something they have not received from authority. In addition, they are unaccustomed to thinking of a horizontally structured society layered into social classes; and in any case, in Japan even the homeless wear shoes.

Like the representations of the inhabitants of the brush houses, the author’s sketch of the doctor consists of a few details (given signs). When a servant goes to his room to announce that an Indian family has brought their baby for his help, the doctor is in bed having breakfast, consisting of sweet biscuits and hot chocolate. Below each eye is a roll of fat, his silk nightshirt from Paris cannot easily be buttoned closed, and in order to hold the porcelain cup he must grasp the handle with his thumb and forefinger while keeping the other three fingers out of the way. He replies to the servant that he is not a veterinarian, and asks whether the Indians can pay.

2 When Japanese answer a question they respond to the speaker's thought, not his words. For example, if it is raining and someone says, "The weather isn't very nice today is it?" the answer in Japanese is "Yes," whereas in English the answer is "No." By nodding their heads the students are agreeing with my idea, that walking barefoot or in soft sandals would not make sounds. That Japanese agree or disagree with the thought and speakers of European languages agree or disagree with the words is so fundamental that I don't understand why this aspect of communication is not part of English language education. Aside from my language classes I am not aware of where this is taught.

The servant goes to the gate again and returns to the doctor's room with Kino's proposed payment of a few poor quality pearls. The servant returns again to the gate to say that the doctor is not at home. I ask whether the author intends for us to view the doctor positively or negatively. We review the details about the physical appearance of the doctor provided by the author: the rolls of fat, the too tight nightshirt, a hand too fat to hold a cup. While I unfold the process of reasoning that leads us to the author's intended inference, they wait patiently for me to tell them the fact they must memorize. We arrive at the conclusion that the doctor is overweight and lazy. I ask again whether the author is portraying him in a positive or negative way. Should we like and respect the doctor? I suggest that if a character is portrayed as unattractive, the author probably intends for us to view that character negatively. In the same way I demonstrate the reasoning process for inferring what the author is showing us about the doctor's attitude toward the native Mexicans. I ask what a veterinarian is. Someone responds that a veterinarian is a doctor for animals. So what is the doctor's opinion of native Mexicans? I ask whether he looks down on them as if they are animals. A few heads nod hesitantly. The author's viewpoint concerning the doctor is confusing, since in Japan it is not unacceptable to express contempt for people of low status.

In hope of finding a way to pay the doctor, Kino goes pearl diving, and he finds the largest pearl anyone has ever seen, "the pearl of the world." News of the find circulates among the indigent community and in the town. The doctor, known never to make house calls at the brush huts, suddenly appears at Kino's house and examines the baby. He offers safekeeping for the pearl in his house and asks Kino whether he is worried about losing it, watching Kino's face as he looks toward the place where the pearl is hidden in the floor. Late that night scratching sounds are heard in the place where the pearl had been hidden. There is a natural connection between the given sign and the author's intended interpretation, and in this case some students are able to infer that the scratching sound is thieves looking for the pearl. But even after I remind them of the doctor's initial refusal to treat the baby, his going to Kino's house after he hears about the pearl, and then his watching Kino's face as he mentions the pearl, it is more difficult for the students to infer that the doctor and his assistant are the thieves.

Even after we review the details revealing the doctor's appearance and character, the students do not easily accept the author's critical portrayal. He is a doctor, that is to say a character of high status, and according to their cultural codes must be spoken of with respect. They do not experience the immediate reaction of disgust that Western readers do at the portrayal of an obese, self indulgent, doctor who will not get out of bed when there is a baby in grave danger outside his gate, who openly expresses disdain for the members of a lower class, who pretends to go to Kino's hut to attend to the baby, but is actually a thief. The doctor presents them with a dilemma. On the one hand they feel sorry for the baby, but they cannot surmount the prohibition against making a judgment on their own, especially a critical judgment, against a character of high rank. Moreover, in Japan it is not unacceptable to look down on people who do not wear shoes and whose houses have dirt floors.

The priest is also a character that presents difficulties for Japanese readers. Steinbeck portrays him as in collusion with the town dwellers' exploitation of the native Mexicans. The pearl divers have long suspected that the pearl merchants cheat them, but since they are illiterate they have no idea what are the actual prices of pearls. There appear to be various pearl merchants competing to buy pearls, but actually there is only one merchant who employs various agents, who give the impression that they are trying to outbid one another to buy pearls. This system keeps the inhabitants of the brush houses in poverty and maintains a constant supply of cheap pearls to the merchant. Each year the priest preaches a sermon on the theme of knowing one's place in society. In this sermon, God has placed each person in the universe to fill a particular role, and each person must fulfill that role and not try to change his position, or evil will be the result. The sermon has as its main premise a falsehood: actually, there is no Christian doctrine supporting the assertion that God has mandated social ranking. However, the native Mexicans know Christian doctrine only from the teaching of the priest. English speaking readers recognize immediately the hypocrisy of the priest, but a sermon

teaching that each person has his place and should keep to it describes Japanese society exactly and makes perfect sense to Japanese readers. However, the intended inference in this case requires readers to apply a reasoning process to some cultural knowledge: to consider the priest's words in light of what they have already read about the pearl merchants and of what they know about Christian doctrine. The contradiction should lead readers to the conclusion that the priest distorts the truth, actually preaches a lie, in order to perpetuate the wide disparity between the two social classes.

Misreading Given Signs in Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party"

When they read Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party" most students are similarly able to draw inferences from signs having a natural connection with their inferences, but not from those that require connecting given signs with knowledge of the world using a reasoning process. As the story opens, a gardener is preparing lawns for the party. Although the author has not yet revealed anything about who owns the lawns, most students are able to infer, after I point out the plural form of lawn, that whoever lives there must be wealthy. However students must be provided models of the logical process necessary for inferring qualities of character from given signs.

Although the other members of the household are busily preparing for the party, Mrs. Sheridan is upstairs in her room. When asked where she would like to have the workmen set up the marquee (a canvas awning to shield the food table from the sun), she replies that this year her daughters should take charge of the preparations and treat her as a guest. She first appears downstairs when a florist arrives with the flowers she has ordered. He has brought so many lilies that the housekeeper is sure there must be a mistake, but Mrs. Sheridan says she did indeed order them; she saw them in a shop the previous day and thought the party was a perfect excuse to have as many lilies as she likes. (Previously in the story there is mention of a lily garden.) When asked to describe the character Mrs. Sheridan the students are able to draw inferences involving natural connections. Some of them say that she likes lilies. They do not make inferences involving logical reasoning, and they cannot allow themselves to describe a character of high rank negatively. Without thinking about the process of reasoning involved, Western readers automatically infer that Mrs. Sheridan is being portrayed as self-centered and a poor household manager.

While the mother is upstairs, the youngest daughter Laura is sent outdoors to tell the workmen where to put the marquee. There are indications that we should understand this to be her first direct encounter with members of a social class other than her own. In only two sentences we are provided a brief sketch of one of the workmen: he is tall, lanky, friendly, easy going, has blue eyes and a nice smile. As he moves toward the site for the marquee he pauses and bends to pinch a sprig of lavender and then brings his fingers to his nose to enjoy the scent. There follows a couple of paragraphs revealing Laura's astonishment at this gesture, her thoughts that he is so unlike any man she knows of her own social class, her comparison of the workman with "the silly boys she danced with and who came to Sunday night supper," her regret that men like him can't be her friends. She reflects further that it is "all the fault . . . of these absurd class distinctions." When asked what Laura likes about the workman, the students respond with inferences involving a natural connection: they say that Laura likes the workman's eyes and his smile. Their answer also indicates that they continue to observe the reading habits required of them in school, namely, they should give equal attention to each item in the text and not decide what is more important. Only after I point out that the author gives much more attention to the workman's enjoying the scent of lavender than to his eyes and his smile, leading Laura to reflect on social class difference, and only after a quiz, in which an answer saying the smile is what she likes about him receives fewer points than an answer saying that it is his enjoying the scent of lavender, do some of them begin to focus on the author's emphasis. When I hand back the papers I explain that the author is showing us that she is impressed with his sensitivity to and appreciation for simple things in nature, in contrast with the men she knows in her own culture. It is essential that the reader notice Laura's attitude concerning social hierarchy, since this scene is the starting point for the major theme of the story and is a precursor to a

conflict between Laura and her sister and mother.

When news arrives concerning an accident nearby, where a man from the cottages down the road has been killed, Laura insists that the party be cancelled, since the noise of the party and the music from the band will disturb the grieving family. Laura and her sister engage in a heated argument, and when Laura approaches her mother with the idea that holding the party would be unsympathetic, Mrs. Sheridan is equally hostile to the idea of cancelling it. Then, seeing herself in a mirror wearing her new hat, Laura has second thoughts about cancelling the party. Perhaps her mother and sister are right. She will think about it later. She decides to ask what her brother thinks, but when he exclaims that she looks great in her hat she doesn't tell him about the accident after all.

If I ask the students why Laura changes her mind about cancelling the party, some of them say it is because she thinks her sister and mother are right, and at this point some of them begin to become restive. Above all, they want to know what is the correct answer. They thought Laura was against holding the party. Is she for it or against it? The correct answer was that Laura wanted to cancel the party, and they do not welcome a variation. I remind them that in contrast with popular fiction literary fiction is not escape, rather it reveals to us aspects of life we have not experienced or have not thought about in the same way as the author. Literary fiction makes us more aware of life as it actually is, or as the author wants us to view it. I suggest that when we look really cool we want to go somewhere, don't we? There are a few smiles. And if we are engaged in a noble cause or humanitarian action, we might postpone it for a while in order to go somewhere and be seen, mightn't we? But the students want to know the answer, A or B, without complicating variations, even if the variations reveal life as it actually is.

At several points in the story Mrs. Sheridan speaks with contempt about the low class cottage dwellers, and on hearing the news of the accident she expresses no sympathy or concern whatsoever for the family of the dead man. After the party, when her husband speaks sympathetically about the family, Mrs. Sheridan reacts first with irritation before deciding to send a basket of left over party food to the widow. When asked to explain in a homework question what more we have been shown about the character of Mrs. Sheridan, there are always several students who say that she is kind. They must give reasons for what they say, so they mention the food basket. In class we review the signs concerning Mrs. Sheridan: her not participating in the party preparations; her ordering dozens of lilies solely for her own pleasure, although she has a lily garden; her several hostile remarks about the cottage dwellers; that she thinks of sending a basket of leftovers only after her husband expresses his sympathy, which makes her uncomfortable. I suggest that the author wants us to infer that the basket of food is sent in order to assuage Mrs. Sheridan's guilt for her cold heartedness. This interpretation is not readily accepted. In Japanese culture, a wife and mother of a wealthy household must be kind. Therefore the wife and mother in the story must certainly be kind.

If asked in a homework question what more we have been shown about the character Laura, there are always several answers saying that she is pure. The word is not used or implied anywhere in the story, so I conclude that it must be a translation of something they are thinking of in Japanese, probably *shitoyaka* (淑やか). In Japan a girl ought to be *shitoyaka*, that is to say, graceful, refined, gentle, ladylike, pure, so the students assume the correct answer must be that Laura is so, whether or not there are signs in the story suggesting this inference about her character. I remind the students that when she went outdoors to meet the workmen she had her bread and butter still in her hand; she disagrees with the importance her society places on class distinctions; and she openly and vigorously disagrees with her older sister and her mother about holding the party. Apparently the author does not present her as *shitoyaka*. Japanese cannot easily set aside the cultural imperatives that contradict the given signs in the text.

Beyond the Classroom

Misreading Given Signs in Shakespeare's *King Lear*

It could be argued that students misread texts out of inexperience or laziness. Indeed, there are

some students who hope to receive a unit of credit for attendance in class. However if we look beyond the classroom it becomes clear that even mature readers bring to the reading of Western literature the habits of mind inherited from their culture. One no less than Takeo Doi, although he spent several years living and working in the West, has misread some of Shakespeare's tragedies, most notably *King Lear*, which he considers to be "an extremely difficult text."[3] The problem seems to be not the text itself but that he has connected the given signs in the play to the Japanese rather than the Western social order. In fact, *Lear* is not considered to be one of Shakespeare's problematic or difficult plays. If one draws from the given signs the intended inferences, the text is quite intelligible.

Shakespeare wrote his tragedies, including *King Lear*, according to the conventions observed by most playwrights of the renaissance. Tragedians of the 16th century looked back to the models of classical Greek tragedy as exemplified by the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and as formulated by Aristotle. In this tradition the tragic hero is usually a king or prince, an exemplary character, who nevertheless carries within himself a "fatal flaw." This defect, unknown to himself during most of the play, is instrumental in setting in motion events that eventually bring about the downfall of the hero and those around him. He becomes aware of his weakness and its role in the impending destruction too late to prevent the final tragedy.

Whether they are familiar with the origins of renaissance tragedy or not, Western readers and theater goers almost universally see in Lear a foolish pride, which leads him to crave flattery and blinds him to the motives of those around him. In the opening scene, the aged Lear, wishing to divide his kingdom as legacy for his three daughters, hosts a ceremony in which each daughter should declare her love for him. He intends to decide the portion of the inheritance for each one according to her speech. The two elder daughters, hoping for the larger inheritance, vie with one another for first place with insincere flattery. When it is her turn to speak, the youngest daughter, Cordelia, says only that she obeys, loves, and honors her father as a daughter should. In his excessive pride Lear is enraged, and he urges her to revise her speech. When Cordelia declines to compete with the hypocrisy of her sisters Lear disinherits her, banishes her, and divides his kingdom into two instead of three parts. However after he suffers cruelty and humiliation at the hands of his elder daughters Lear awakens to their treachery and to Cordelia's sincerity and loyalty.

Doi says that, wishing to avoid discussing actual people, he brings to his explanation of Japanese culture examples from literature.[4] In doing so he succumbs to the occupational hazard of those in his profession who view literary characters as analysands, overlooking the distinction between natural and given signs. However his discussion of *King Lear* mainly goes astray because he brings to the text a cultural inheritance that leads to misreading of given signs in the text. Although he does not have the inhibitions that students do against drawing any inferences at all, he does have the same disinclination to allow an author to present a character of high rank in a critical light. He does this not unthinkingly, as do the students, but entertains consciously the view that "there may be reason to believe that social life everywhere, not only in Japan, is conducted according to the same social rules."[5] Doi says that he can make this "extremely difficult text" easier to understand by explaining it in light of the concepts *honne/tatemae*, and so doing he will also demonstrate the universality of this Japanese dyad.[6] However, connecting the social rules of his own culture to the given signs in a Western text creates a distortion. Considering only the codes of the Japanese social order, namely that the wishes of someone of high status must be obeyed on the basis of his rank, Doi's position is that the *tatemae* of the two elder sisters "is appropriate in this situation," and he explains Cordelia's forthrightness as her *honne*. Cordelia's speech is inappropriate, says Doi, because it "goes against the will of her father." An appropriate (*tatemae*) speech would have observed the requirements of the situation as

3 Doi, p. 72.
4 Ibid., p. 71.
5 Ibid., p. 62.
6 Ibid., p. 72.

the elder sisters have done.[7] For Doi, Cordelia, along with Lear, is responsible for the tragic outcome of the play. Such an interpretation is, of course, entirely at variance with the Western tradition of tragedy.

Although in English discourse there are a few words normally thought of in paired relation, such as heads/tails for the two sides of a coin or the Kantian phenomena/noumena, there is no such dyadic pair in English or in any other European language concerning the face that is presented to the world and the self hidden within. There are numerous terms implying such a distinction, however these carry implied praise (straightforward, sincere, genuine) or blame (insincere, two-faced, double-tongued, hypocritical). In the West, to veil the inner thought behind the outer manifestation is acceptable in fewer circumstances than among Japanese and is mainly limited to avoiding being rude, avoiding causing embarrassment or emotional pain, or, in some circumstances, saving face. Otherwise, a motive or intention that is hidden or misrepresented in the outward manner is an indication of inferior character. In the West trust is based on a kind of silent contract that the outward manifestation represents the inner self. Among Western audiences and readers Cordelia is one of Shakespeare's most admired female characters.

Solutions

That students should draw inferences on their own does not need to be mentioned in university literature classes, or even high school classes in the West, nor do students need to be provided models as to how it is done. In fact, the words *infer* and *inference* usually are not mentioned in literature classes. However, students who have never read a line of literature and are studying it for the first time in a foreign language cannot reasonably be expected to acquire in a fourteen-week semester a second set of reading habits that are entirely at variance with the expectations of their culture and their school system. Ideally, SPS literature courses would have as prerequisite a course on Western culture that would provide understanding of the differences between Japanese and Western social structures and how they affect social interaction and habits of mind, including reading habits. Ideally students also would have done exercises in drawing inferences involving reasoning from partial clues and knowledge of the world to the most probable conclusion.[8]

Absent this kind of preparation for my courses, I provide a brief introduction to the fundamentals of Western culture and occasionally repeat the information at key points during the semester. Students are told what are some of the differences between popular fiction and literary fiction. Among these are the differences in the demands made on the participation of the reader. In the case of popular fiction, passive reading can usually suffice, since plot is the most prominent feature and the characters are relatively uncomplicated. However, writers of literary fiction employ a greater array of narrative techniques and often suggest with a few details rather than give the complete picture. Readers must be engaged more actively with the text than when reading popular fiction, supplying reasonable conclusions from given signs. I sometimes compare fiction with picture puzzles. Reading popular fiction is like being given the completed puzzle with all the pieces in place, or at least clear indications as to their arrangement; literary fiction often hands us the pieces, and reading a text involves fitting them together one by one. Much of the pleasure of reading literary fiction is our active engagement in the making of connections and our gradual realization of how the parts make up the whole. Most of all, popular fiction is mainly entertainment that provides an escape, whereas literary fiction leads us to view an aspect of human nature or society more clearly.

To enable students in the SPS English and American Literature courses to better understand what they read, various problem solving and discussion exercises are part of the literature courses. In addition to the modeling of how Western minds arrive at inferences, described above, as early in the semester as possible I hand out photocopies of student answers to homework or quiz questions. For each ques-

7 Ibid., p. 73.

8 This kind of instruction would also be valuable as part of or prerequisite for English language curricula, since the mental habits that Western readers bring to their reading of literature are also part of communication in daily life.

tion there are four or five different answers on the sheets. I explain that most of the answers are correct, but they did not receive the same score. Correct answers can be weak or incomplete, or they can be satisfactory, or they can be strong, really excellent. We compare the student answers, and I explain why some are stronger than others. If time permits, students work on problem solving exercises in small groups: a set of answers to one of the quiz or homework questions that I have not discussed. They must rank the answers and explain why they decided some are stronger than others. One person from each group then reports to the class that group's ranking of the answers and the reasons. I comment on the various groups' results. At times students work in small groups to solve an inference problem. They receive a short narrative of a situation that parallels something in the next day's reading assignment. A series of questions guides them to arriving at the correct inference. Having already drawn the inference for a similar kind of sign helps in doing the same when reading the literary text.

By the end of a one semester course usually a number of students are still waiting for the correct answers and memorizing my conclusions from the signs given in the texts, as their education has trained them to do. Since they cannot be expected to do otherwise within such a short period of time, the scoring and grading are designed with that factor in mind. Students who are beginning to attempt their own interpretations are rewarded, and those who have listened attentively and participated actively can pass or even do well in the course. Sometimes there a few students in a class that have chosen to take a second literature course, and these students are usually more confident in attempting their own inferences and can do so more accurately than they did in the first course.

Since what is necessary for understanding Western literature, drawing inferences from given signs, is very much the same as interpreting natural signs in daily communication, requiring a second literature course would also be helpful for developing general communication skills.

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